CLUB VCS

THE ATARI VCS FANZINE

FALL 2023 - ISSUE 01

IS THE FUN BACK?

ATARI'S UNLIKELY TURNAROUND

RANKING RECHARGED

Atari's first 8 Recharged titles ranked!

THE VOICE OF a VILLAIN

An interview with Patrick Hickey Jr.

HEAD in the CLOUDS?

Cloud gaming on the VCS

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VOICE OF A VILLAIN

A conversation with BPM voice talent Patrick Hickey Jr. by Club VCS member Rick R.

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WELCOME TO THE CLUB!

CLUB VCS launched in late January 2022 as a subforum of Atari I/O **dedicated to the Atari VCS 800 PC-Console hybrid.**

The intent behind the club was to create a special place for Atari VCS fans and owners to convene and discuss all things Atari VCS. In the months since, we've grown the Club to over 60 members, hosted 20 VCS Recharged Squad Challenges, held three giveaways, and have over 100 topics!

The Club VCS Fanzine is an extension of the subforum. The goal of the fanzine is to highlight some of the cool things going on in the world of the VCS and our little corner of the Atari fan community. In this zine you'll find interviews, community member spotlights (Score Chasers), reviews, previews, and more! With new games coming all the time, there has never been a better time to be a VCS owner!

We hope that you enjoy this first issue and that this is just the first of many!

Sabertooth

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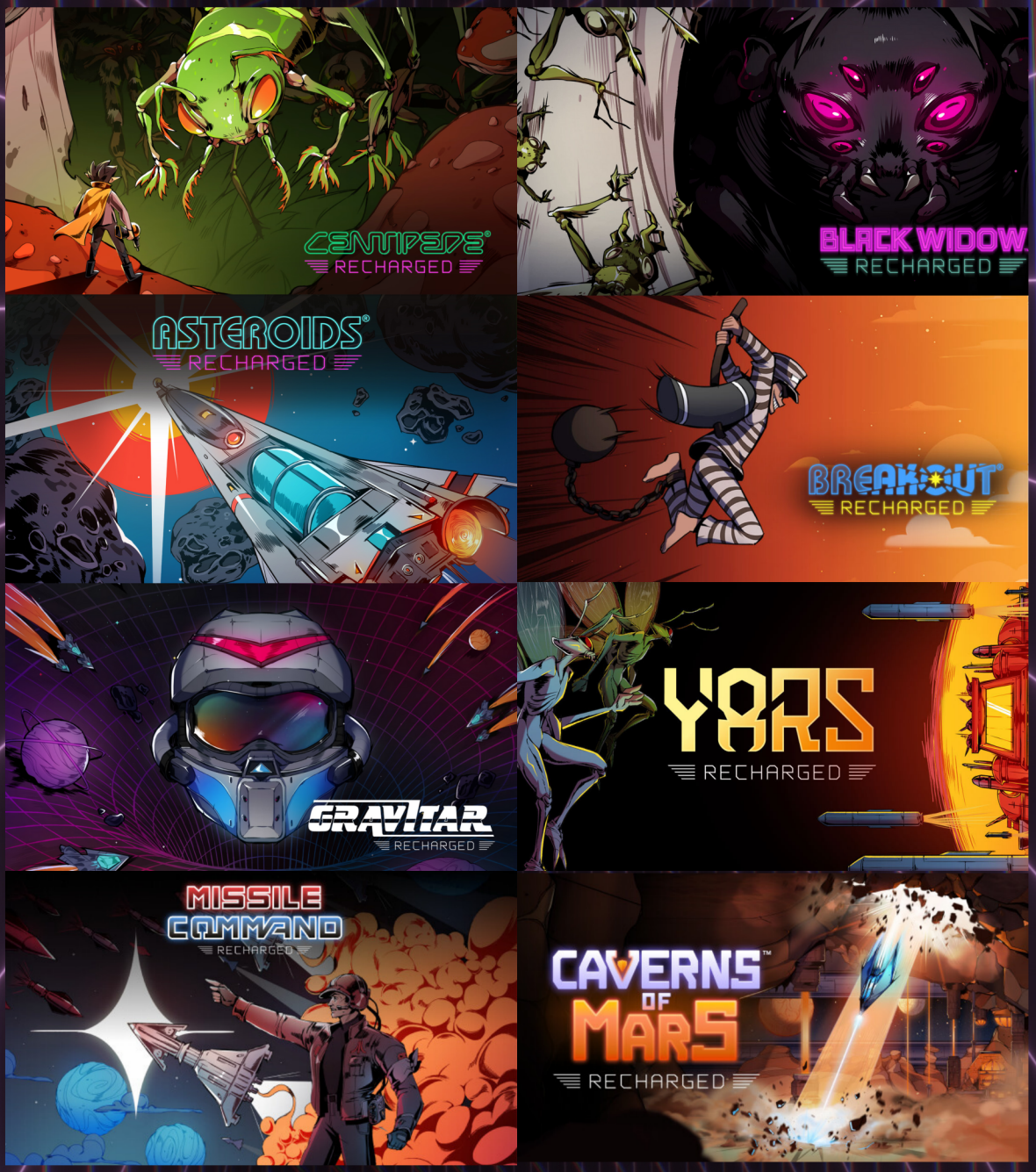
RANKING RECHARGED

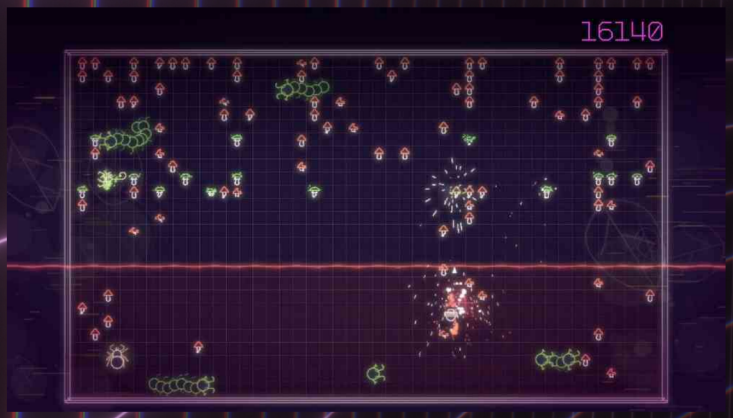
Atari's ***Recharged*** series kicked off in 2020 with ***Missile Command: Recharged***. Released to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Atari's arcade classic, *Missile Command: Recharged* laid the groundwork for the series to come. In 2021, Atari abandoned the free-to-play mobile space to focus on premium console gaming. With this pivot came the announcement of several new "premium" *Recharged* titles. They're all great, but we rank the first eight games in order of **awesomeness**!



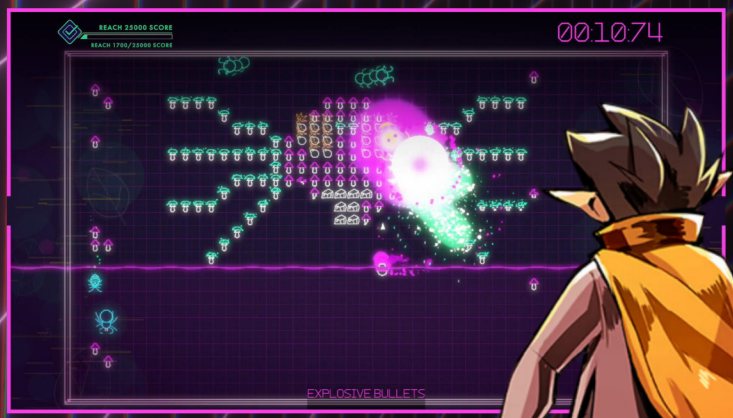
08 CENTiPEDE: ReCHARGED

The first full game in the series, *CENTIPEDE: RECHARGED* set the template for all subsequent entries: Arcade Mode, Challenges/Missions Mode, achievements, leaderboards, co-op play, and a banging soundtrack from Megan McDuffee.

The entire affair is still on a single screen, but this time it's horizontal for modern displays. Player movement is limited to the bottom third of the playfield. Centipedes enter from the top of the screen and begin their march to the bottom. The onscreen action starts out slowly but very rapidly builds to a frenzy with multiple centipedes, spiders, fleas and scorpions to contend with. Once the explosions start and the whole screen rains fleas, you can feel very overwhelmed. It's easy to get boxed in. Learning how to strategically use power-ups is critical to survival.



Arcade Mode provides a healthy dose of single-screen, high score chasing action that anyone who grew up in the arcades will appreciate. While great in small bites, it does become somewhat tiresome. Challenge Mode provides additional depth and value to the game.



CENTIPEDE: RECHARGED is held back by glitchy mouse support and an added three life mode that makes the core game much too easy. Otherwise, it effectively captures the spirit of the arcade classic, while adding modern features, excellent music and a visual flare that make it relevant for today.

07 MiSSILE COMMaND: ReCHARGED

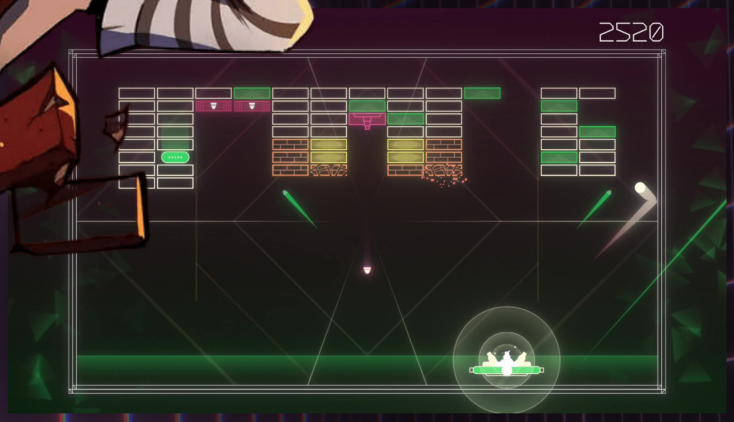
MISSILE COMMAND: RECHARGED (2022) is a reimagining of the beloved Atari arcade classic. Survive wave after wave of enemy attacks in this fast-paced, arcade action game. Players must defend their bases by shooting down an endless barrage of missiles hailing from the sky. Launch counter missiles to protect your bases and target power-ups to gain an edge at critical moments. This 2022 update enhances the visuals and adds a Missions Mode to bring the game in line with the rest of Atari's Recharged series.

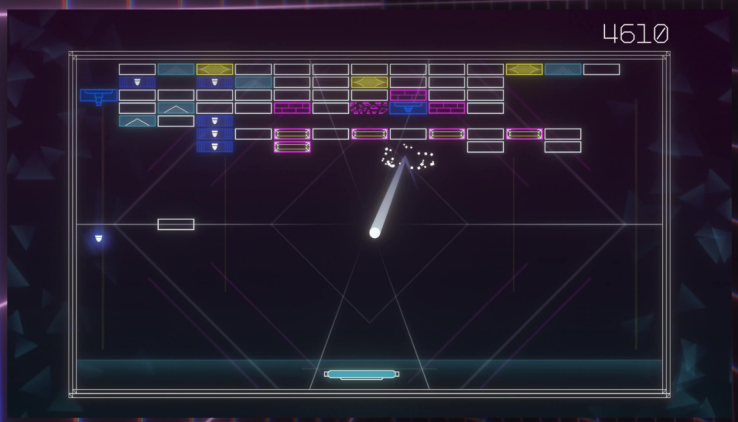
One of the coolest features of *MISSILE COMMAND* is the variety of enemies including tanks - which attack from the sides - and laser equipped drones. The Missions Mode is sufficiently different from Arcade Mode to ensure replayability. The addition of Megan McDuffee's military-inspired soundtrack really adds to the game's Cold War ambience.

Unfortunately, both Modern and Classic Controllers are a bit too sluggish to keep up with the action. Mouse/trackball support is glitchy at best. This keeps the game from truly shining.

That said, *MISSILE COMMAND: RECHARGED* is a solid update to the 2020 version, bringing the game in line with the rest of the series and refining the gameplay, graphics and music. But, as in the 1980 classic, there are no winners in nuclear war. No matter how good you think you are, THE END is nigh!

06 BREAKOUT: RECHARGED





An update to the grand daddy of all brick-breakers, *BREAKOUT: RECHARGED* is a bit of a departure from the other Recharged titles in that it was the first non-shooter, has a somewhat unique visual style, and was the first in the series to offer a three life (ball) mode. It adds depth to the *Breakout* formula with multiple power-ups, offensive bricks and a co-op mode.

Given the built-in rotary function of the Classic Controller, expectations for paddle functionality were high for *BREAKOUT: RECHARGED*. Ultimately, the rotary/paddle function just works OK. It's generally responsive but doesn't seem quite tuned for a widescreen aspect ratio. Getting across the screen takes more than a full rotation which can feel awkward. It also sometimes jitters, causing a lost ball. Some fine-tuning or a sensitivity adjustment could help a lot.

In Arcade Mode, the levels play like the "Progressive" game mode of *Super Breakout*, with new bricks constantly added to the top. Power-ups like spread shot, explosive balls and missile launchers are helpful and look cool. Challenge Mode adds 50 more levels; some seem near impossible.

BREAKOUT: RECHARGED is a good game that is held back from greatness by sometimes glitchy controls. Paddle sensitivity adjustments could send this one near the top of our list. As it stands, it's a fitting tribute to the arcade classic and a unique title in the series.

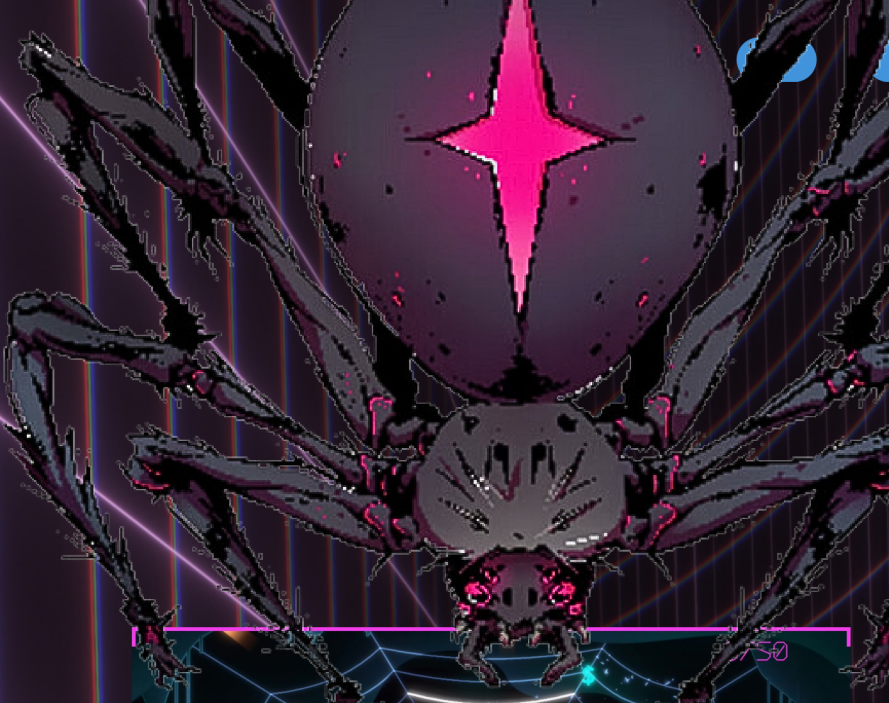
05 YaRS: ReCHARGED

YARS: RECHARGED is a modern take on *Yars' Revenge*, the 1982 smash hit for the Atari 2600. Programmed by the incomparable Howard Scott Warshaw, *Yars' Revenge* went on to become the best-selling original title for the platform. This is quite a legacy to live up to.

At its core, *YARS: RECHARGED* is a twin-stick shooter. It borrows elements of *Yars' Revenge* and combines it with a dash of "bullet hell" and a slick future retro aesthetic to deliver a fresh take on HSW's classic.

As with the original, you control a Yars, an insectoid space race that – according to lore – descended from the common house fly on Earth. The Yars are again at war with the Qotile. It's your job to take out Qotile defenses through 30 levels in either Arcade or Missions modes: for 60 levels total. The level design for both modes is interesting, although level-skip for Arcade Mode would be a welcomed change. Some users have reported issues with inverted controls when using an XBOX controller. The great soundtrack is also overwhelmed by the sound effects.

Overall, *YARS: RECHARGED* is a fun update to the 2600 classic. Some tweaks to the audio mix, control fixes and a level-skip would make this near perfect. As it is, *YARS: RECARGED* is the best sequel to the original yet attempted.



04 BLACK WIDOW: RECHARGED

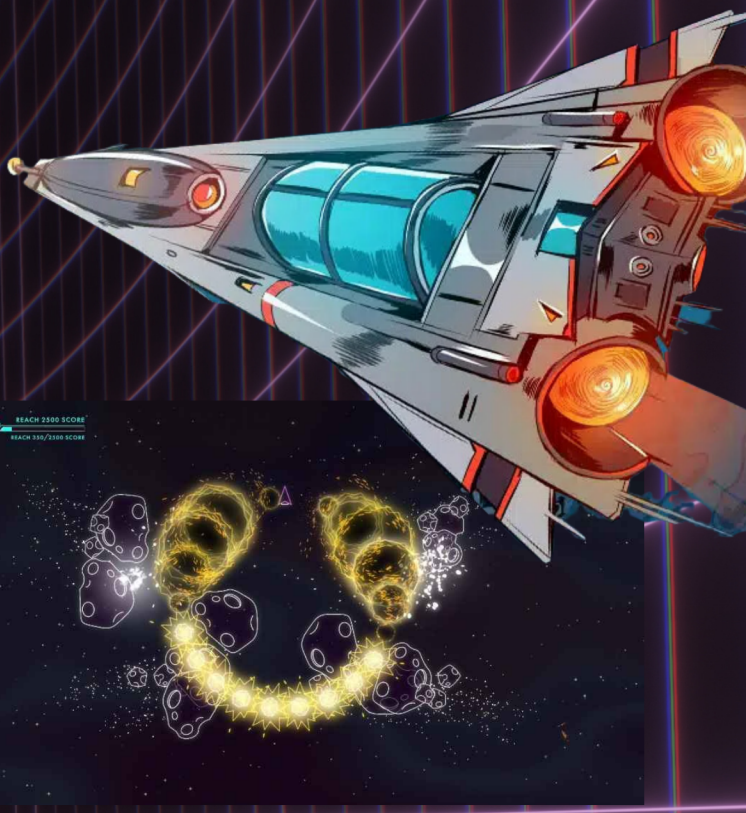
BLACK WIDOW: RECHARGED was the first true surprise in the series. Like other Recharged titles, it takes a classic Atari property and gives it a fresh coat of paint; including a neon vector-like graphic aesthetic and more modern gaming elements like power-ups, leaderboards, and challenges. What sets *BLACK WIDOW: RECHARGED* apart from the other games in the series is that this marks the first time that Atari has ever revisited this IP. There has never been a sequel to the 1982 arcade original and it's a bit of a "deep cut" choice for a reboot. It's good to see Atari taking risks!

The gameplay has strong echoes of the original. You still control the spider and fight off an endless onslaught of various insects moving across the web. The colors cycle on a timed basis to designate "waves." Different insects have different attributes. One swarms in a circular pattern, one drops power-ups, one takes multiple shots and attacks when hit, one shoots projectiles, and another lays eggs that hatch into exploding bugs. The game is tough but fair. At launch, the single-life mode was unforgiving. Fortunately, a software update added "Classic" and "Classic Recharged" modes, each with 3 lives.

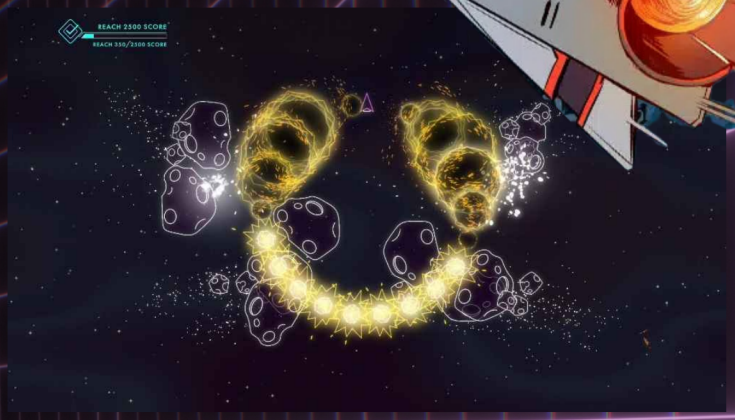
BLACK WIDOW: RECHARGED is a solid update to a forgotten game from Atari's classic era. It's an easy recommendation for fans of the original game or of twin-stick shooters in general.

03 ASTEROIDS: RECHARGED

With *ASTEROIDS: RECHARGED,* Atari revisits Ed Logg's seminal 1979 arcade space shooter. Of the games so far released in the series, *ASTEROIDS: RECHARGED* perhaps feels the most true to its arcade inspiration. The simplicity is a mixed blessing. It's sure to entice fans of the arcade classic but may be too simple for modern gamers to embrace.



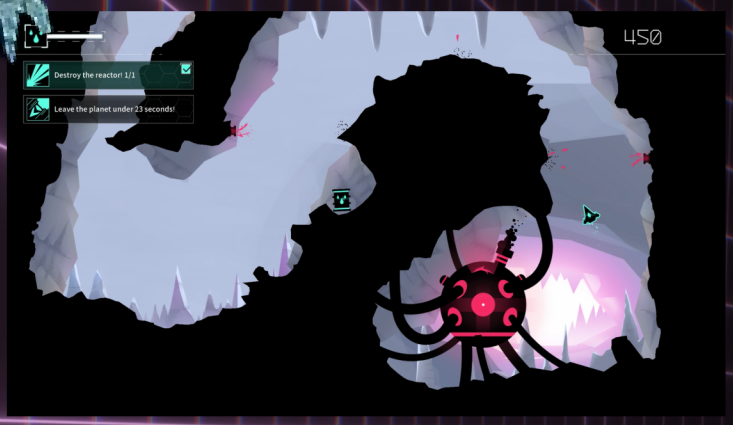
The game can be played in single-player or co-op, and offers two modes of play: Arcade and Challenges. Arcade Mode is a pure high-score chasing affair. Challenges Mode expands the game, providing a wide variety of task-based challenge levels.

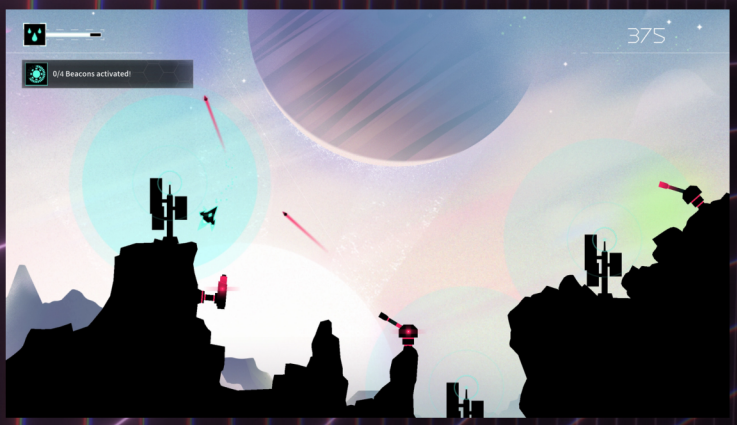


Where the original *Asteroids* employed a novel 5-button control scheme to control ship rotation, thrust and hyperspace, the VCS version effectively maps these to both the Modern Controller and Classic Controller. The Classic Controller in particular provides some true retro flare by using the built-in twist function to rotate your craft. It's a great example of the Classic Controller done right.

ASTEROIDS: RECHARGED is an excellent update to Atari's venerable classic. The overall design of the game - both aesthetically and in terms of gameplay - honors its arcade inspiration. Simply put, if you like *Asteroids*, you should thoroughly enjoy *ASTEROIDS: RECHARGED.*

02 GRaVITAR: ReCHARGED





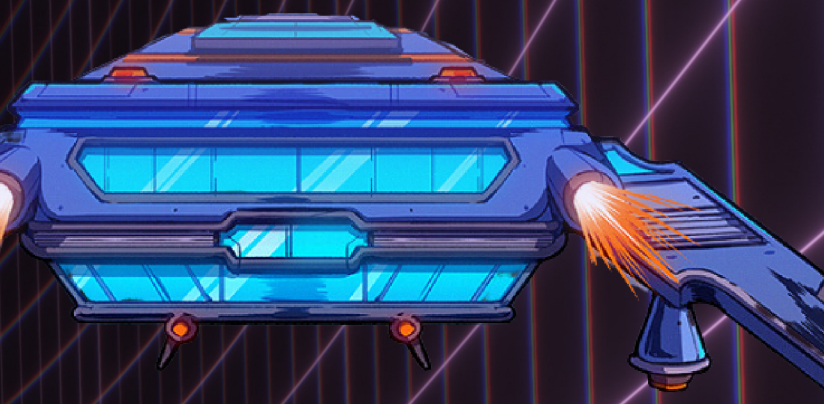
The original *Gravitar* (1982) combined the thrust and rotate control of shooters like *Asteroids* with the gravity physics of *Lunar Lander*. It was a difficult game that required precise control. While not a huge success for Atari, it did receive a release on the 2600. *GRAVITAR: RECHARGED* tamps down the overall difficulty of its predecessor, improves controls, and updates the graphics. The first of the second wave of Recharged series titles, it introduced a new graphic style and optional score modifiers in Arcade Mode.

Patience, precision and chill are the words that come to mind with *GRAVITAR: RECHARGED*. Instead of a fast-paced, blasting assault, *GRAVITAR* is a slow paced game. It requires finesse to excel. Arcade Mode has 30 missions across multiple solar systems. There are 30 more levels in the Missions Mode that offer more of the same. The co-op mode incorporates a tether that requires true cooperation and coordination with your Player Two. The game also makes the best use of the Classic Controller this side of *Thrustlander*.

Visually, the game's aesthetic reminds one of a Trapper Keeper circa 1989. The soundtrack matches the vibe, with a sparse, spacey sound that evokes solitude.

GRAVITAR: RECHARGED is one of the toughest games in the series. It's also a true joy to play.

01 CAVERNS OF MARS: RECHARGED



The original *Caverns of Mars* was famously programmed by a teenage Greg Christensen for the Atari Program Exchange (APX) in 1981 for the Atari 8-Bit. It went on to become the best selling APX game program ever. More than 40 years later, Atari returns to the red planet with *CAVERNS OF MARS: RECHARGED!*

Another deep cut in the series, *CAVERNS* is notable for being the first Recharged game without the involvement of series co-creator Adam Nickerson. Developed by Sneaky Box, *CAVERNS* offers a fully destructible environment and gamplay reminiscent of the indie game *Downwell*. Instead of "gunboots", you use your weapons to slow your descent to dodge obstacles and enemies. Balance weapons, fuel use & choose your power-ups carefully as you lay waste to Mars.

Unlike the original, in which each level requires arming of a fusion bomb and a timed ascension, the Arcade Mode of this Recharged version sends you ever deeper until you destroy the Martian reactor at the core. With practice, most players will be able to complete Arcade Mode. Missions Mode boasts 30 more levels that will test the mettle of the best pilots. The game also offers one of the more unique co-op approaches of any game in the series, with one player controlling the rate of descent and the other controlling weapons fire.

CAVERNS of MARS: RECHARGED is a fantastic addition to the series. Tight controls, solid game play and a good challenge make this our top pick!

QUANTUM™ RECHARGED

REVIEW

Published 2023 (ATARI)
Developer: SNEAKYBOX
RETAIL: $9.99

QUANTUM: RECHARGED is an update to the 1983 arcade game *Quantum*, developed by Betty Ryan at General Computer Corporation under contract with Atari. The original *Quantum* is a bit of a hidden gem from Atari's classic era. The game employed a trackball and color vector screen. Players moved a cursor to encircle atomic particles. With its novel play style and abstract premise, *Quantum* failed to gain traction in early '80's arcades filled with shooters. *QUANTUM: RECHARGED* revisits this largely forgotten arcade title.

TAKE CONTROL

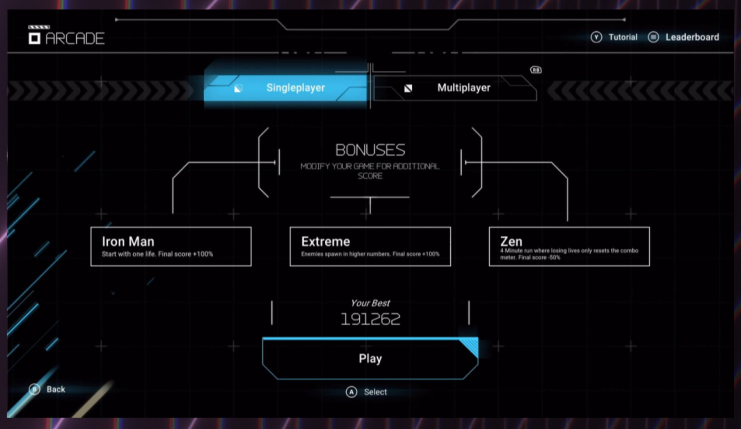
The first time you play *QUANTUM: RECHARGED* you're automatically taken to a quick tutorial to acquaint you with the game's controls. The controls are fairly intuitive and harken back to that old Atari adage "Easy to learn, difficult to master." Use the thumbstick to control your ship.

RB provides a subtle speed increase, and hitting A provides a short boost, the use of which is limited by a blue energy meter. While there is Classic Controller and mouse support, the game was designed for a game pad and that is the recommended way to play.

There is no fire button in *QUANTUM: RECHARGED*. As with the original, the player uses their ship to create loops to encircle enemies and suck them into the void. *QUANTUM: REHARGED* goes one step further allowing players to form loops near enemies, or in their path – almost as a trap. This is often more effective and less dangerous than trying to encircle them.

Enemy types are varied. Some go in predictable patterns, others follow your ship, while others appear to traverse randomly across the playfield. The most dangerous are the laser enemies, which fire beams across the screen. As players progress, more and more enemies appear. This crowds the playfield to the point where its nearly impossible to move without taking a hit. Soon the enemies overwhelm and it's game over.

Power-ups include Extra Life, Shock, Slow Down, Shield and Overcharge.



Unlike other series entries, where these feel somewhat generic, here the power-ups can be strategically left on the playfield and employed when needed.

In Arcade Mode, the default setting provides the player with three hits. The hit counter can be restored with the collection of a health power-up. Taking a similar approach to *Gravitar: Recharged, QUANTUM: RECHARGED* offers the option to stack one of three modifiers:

- The "Iron Man" modifier starts the player with one life and adds 100% to your final score.

- The "Extreme" modifier causes enemies to spawn at a higher rate and adds 100% to your final score.

- The "Zen" modifier is a 4-minute run that reduces the final score by 50%.

The choice of whether or not to use a modifier adds an interesting strategic element to the game. High score chasers will want to consider the Iron Man and Extreme modifiers, while new players and casual gamers might prefer the Zen modifier.

Missions Mode adds 25 challenge levels to the proceedings. These are goal oriented, with the goal mostly being "Destroy all Enemies." There are some challenge levels that add a time limit or score goal. This makes things slightly more interesting.

One important aspect of Missions Mode is that several of the levels teach you how to deal with a specific enemy type. This helps to build your skill set and can serve to improve your performance in Arcade Mode.

Couch co-op returns to *QUANTUM: RECHARGED* and greatly enhances the game in either Arcade or Missions mode. Due to the size of the playfield, the screen will zoom in an out depending on the distance of players from one another. This can be slightly distracting but is a necessary design choice for co-op.

GRAPHICS

The look of *QUANTUM: RECHARGED* strikes me as a return to the earlier titles of the Recharged series. Glowing neon enemies dance across a static single-screen, hatch marked with a Tron-like grid. The camera tracks the action, but you're always constrained by the well-defined perimeter of the playfield. Besides constant color-cycling, the playfield is essentially unchanged throughout the game. Unlike *Centipede: Recharged* or *Black Widow: Recharged,* the color-cycling here does not denote wave progression and appears to be aesthetic only. Instead, progression is marked by the appearance of new enemy types.

The player ship and enemies are brightly colored with a blooming neon-glow. Enemies look like they come from the same universe but have unique color assignments and other attributes so that they are easily distinguishable from one another in a hectic play environment. The presentation is simple yet effective, and calls back to the minimalism of the original arcade game.

SOUND & MUSIC

For *QUANTUM: RECHARGED*, Atari has once again partnered with composer Megan McDuffee for the in-game music. The soundtrack is stellar and is some of her best work for the series.

As for the effects, they are extremely minimal. You'll hear the low drone of your ship and sounds for collecting powerups, step downs to the score multiplier, ship impacts and the whooshing of enemies sucked into the hoop-like voids that you create. This is in contrast to games like *Yars: Recharged* or *Caverns of Mars: Recharged*, where the blasts and explosions sometimes overwhelm.

CREATURE COMFORTS

Like all entries in the Recharged series, *QUANTUM: RECHARGED* includes proper unlockable achievements which have become a staple of modern gaming. Some are progressive, while other achievements are awarded for completion of a single task. If you've played the other RECHARGED titles, these will be familiar to you.

Fans of the highscore chase will be pleased to know that the game includes local and online leaderboards. In Missions Mode, scores are cumulative.

Graphics settings can be adjusted for screen shake. The game also includes accessibility options with eight different color blind settings and accessibility mouse functionality. This type of option is good to see and is something more games should incorporate.

OVERALL

With *QUANTUM: RECHARGED*, Atari shows its willingness to take risks with the series. They've mined their IP catalogue for an obscure and underappreciated gem, identified what made that game interesting in the first place, and updated the gameplay, graphics and feature set to make the game compelling to modern and retro audiences alike. It's a near perfect execution of the Recharged series concept.

The novel gameplay mechanics of *Quantum* sets the game apart from every other title in the series. There is something simultaneously nerve-racking and serene about careening past enemies and making loops to trap or encircle them. Combined with the simple graphics and pulsing groove of the soundtrack, *QUANTUM: RECHARGED* offers a truly unique play experience for VCS owners.

Have you played *QUANTUM: RECHARGED* on the VCS or on another platform? What do you think of the game? Let us know by writing clubvcs@protonmail.com or sound off on the ClubVCS forum!

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IS THE FUN BACK?

For gamers of a certain age, the name Atari needs no introduction. During a brief period in the 1970s and early-80s, the Atari brand was synonymous with gaming. Atari is the company that created the commercial video game market. Atari is the company that filled arcades, its iconic "Fuji" logo emblazoned on cabinets with titles like *Asteroids, Battlezone, Breakout, Missile Command, Pong* and *Tempest.* Atari is the company that popularized home console gaming with the Atari 2600 and helped to bring computing home with the Atari 8-bit line of computers. It's also a company that notoriously squandered its position as a market leader, nearly caused the collapse of the video game industry, and has changed corporate ownership so many times in its 50+ year history that it's sometimes hard to recognize.

From its sale to Warner Communications in 1976, to the 1984 split and spinoff of the consumer division to Jack Tramiel, to its 1998 sale to Hasbro, the once powerful company has dwindled to a shadow of its former self.

The most recent incarnation of Atari dates back to 2001, when the brand was acquired by French games publisher Infogrames Interactive. In 2003, Infogrames changed its name to Atari S.A. While the name changed, Atari S.A. largely ignored the IP they acquired with the Atari brand and continued to develop and publish licensed titles just as they had under the Infogrames umbrella. Legacy properties were relegated to retro

Test Drive: Is this an Atari game?

Infogrames Logo

collections, Flashback plug-in-plays and t-shirts, with a rare refresh showing up here and there. While games like *Test Drive* and *Alone in the Dark* carried the Atari fuji logo, they had little connection to the spirit of Atari: pick up and play games that are "easy to learn, hard to master."

In more recent years the storied brand has seemed to lose all focus. Following its 2013 bankruptcy and reorganization under former CEO Fred Chesnais, Atari had taken a "let's see if something sticks" approach to its businesses; bouncing from free-to-play mobile games, to dalliances with crypto and casino operations, to licenses for game shows and Atari-themed hotels.

For many enthusiasts and long-time fans, the once iconic game maker seemed to be Atari in name only. A logo on a t-shirt. Another recycled ROM collection. Something to be licensed out with little care for the legacy of the brand. A "Zombie Atari", whose shambling corpse roamed aimlessly, feeding on the nostalgia of aging GenXers. Even the 2017 announcement of the Atari VCS was greeted with earned skepticism among a large portion of Atarians – this writer included.

But in 2021 something changed.

ENTER WADE ROSEN

In April 2021, Atari announced Wade Rosen, Atari's largest shareholder and Chairman of the company's Board of Directors, as CEO, replacing Chesnais at Atari's helm. Prior to taking a leadership position at Atari, Rosen was CEO of Ziggurat Interactive, a games developer and publisher that focuses on bringing classic gaming content from the 80s, 90s and early 2000s to modern gaming platforms.

With this background, Atari's new leader seemed particularly well-suited to breathe new life into Atari and leverage the brand and its properties in a way that previous leadership, going back to the Tramiel family, had not.

Within months of Rosen's ascension, Atari announced a pivot to premium console games, the end of its casino operations, the unilateral termination of its contracts for Atari Token and related projects, and a restructuring of its team and businesses to better align with the brand.

In the more than two years that have followed, Atari under Rosen has begun to deliver. The *Atari 50* collection received near universal acclaim from critics and fans, old and new. Licensing deals with the likes of LEGO, New Wave Toys, and MyArcade, have delivered some of the coolest Atari branded products in years. The Recharged series has reinvigorated several dormant properties, including deep cut titles like *Black Widow, Caverns of Mars* and *Quantum*.

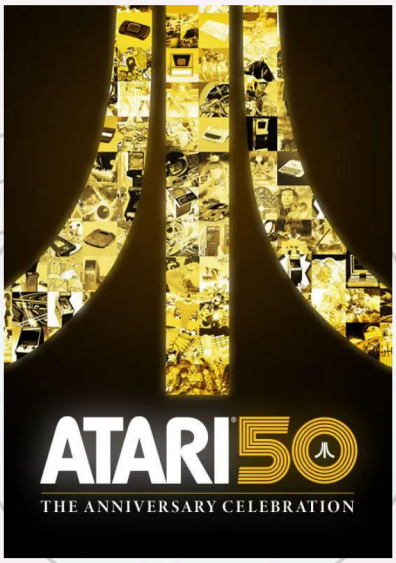
New IPs like *Kombinera, Qomp* and *Mr. Run & Jump* deliver modern gaming experiences that adhere Atari's founding ethos.

Is the "fun" back? Let's take a look at Atari's turnaround and find out!

PIVOT TO "PREMIUM"

Perhaps the most dramatic aspect of Atari's turnaround under Rosen's stewardship has been the company's pivot to "premium games." From 2013 to 2021, Atari's publishing had been primarily focused on mobile games. In July 2021, the company declared its intent to return to console and PC publishing with the announcement of – the yet to be published – *Food Fight* remake. This was followed in August by the announcement of *Centipede: Recharged*; the first full game in the Recharged series.

Since the release of *Centipede: Recharged,* Atari has made good on this promise, publishing more than a dozen games across modern console platforms, including the Atari VCS.



Developed by Digital Eclipse, the critically acclaimed *Atari 50* collection set a new standard for video game anthologies.

These include the following:

- *Centipede: Recharged*
- *Black Widow: Recharged*
- *Asteroids: Recharged*
- *Breakout: Recharged*
- *Tempest 4000 (VCS/SWITCH)*
- *Kombinera*
- *Gravitar: Recharged*
- *Yars: Recharged*
- *Atari Mania*
- *Missile Command: Recharged*
- *Atari 50*
- *Akka Arrh*
- *Caverns of Mars: Recharged*
- *Pixel Ripped: 1978* (VR)
- *Mr. Run & Jump*
- *Quantum: Recharged*
- *Days of Doom*

In general, the games released over the past two years have been good to great!

Atari 50 has been the most well received. Developed by Digital Eclipse, the collection tells Atari's complicated story through a unique timeline, including video interviews, archival footage, photographs and games. It's truly a fantastic collection that every Atari fan and anyone interested in the history of gaming should experience.

Other games, like *Atari Mania* and the *Recharged* series lean into Atari's legacy in fresh and new ways.

The games aren't just a nostalgia trip either. Atari has also worked to develop and publish new IP like *Kombinera* and *Mr. Run & Jump* from St. Louis-based Graphite Lab. They tapped the legendary Jeff Minter of Llamasoft to reimagine the once lost arcade game *Akka Arrh.* And, in a very smart move, partnered with Brazilian Developer AVORE to publish *Pixel Ripped: 1978* for VR platforms.

It's good to see Atari focused on original software again. More importantly, the games being released feel like Atari games. They are fun, pick-up and play experiences. Reimagined titles pay tribute to the spirit of the originals. This is not a fuji logo on a random game as was so often the case under Infogrames. *These ARE Atari games.*

Atari's *Recharged* series taps into the essence of the company's classic IP.

HARDWARE

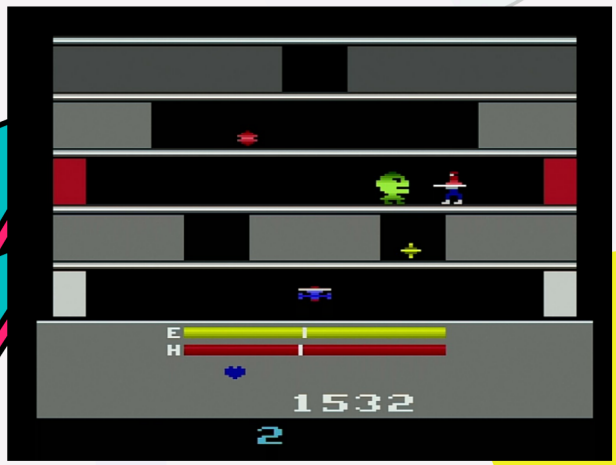
Rosen has described hardware as a core component of Atari's businesses. Despite this, Atari's CEO has paid scant attention to the Atari VCS.

The VCS was a product of the Chesnais era. It was conceived in 2017, funded via IndieGoGo in 2018 and shipped to backers in December 2020. Although the retail release was in June 2021, those wheels were already in motion when Rosen came aboard. Rosen effectively inherited the machine when he took over the company in April 2021. Fans have noted his reluctance to mention the VCS in interviews.

In April 2022, Michael Artz, the head of VCS at Atari announced his departure from the company. A formal replacement was never named. In December 2022, Atari announced the end of its manufacturing contracts related to the VCS. It was a grim time for VCS owners and many wondered if support might cease.

The Polymega Remix and Polymega App are to be integrated into the Atari VCS.

Fortunately, this hasn't happened. 2023 has been a great year for the VCS in terms of software releases. The addition of David Paige (aka Davpa) to the Atari team in 2022 has led to some real wins for the little console that could. This includes the release of *Alien Abduction* from *H.E.R.O.* developer John Van Ryzin, and Atari 2600 and 7800 homebrew titles.



Alien Abduction is a digital exclusive on the Atari VCS.

In July 2023, Atari and Playmaji announced a strategic partnership to develop an Atari module for the Polymega and add support for the Polymega App and Polymega Remix to the VCS. No release dates have been given.

On August 24, 2023, Atari shook the retro gaming community with the announcement of the 2600+. Developed in partnership with Plaion (Embracer Group), this emulation-based HD console is planned for a worldwide holiday release. Styled like a 4-Switch 2600, the console accepts cartridges from both the 2600 and 7800 libraries.

Reaction has been mixed, largely due to compatibility issues with specialized carts, including many

modern homebrews. Some issues could be addressed in future firmware updates. Despite these concerns from the homebrew and collector set, interest appears high and Rosen has pledged to support the new console beyond launch. Already an enhanced version of *Berzerk* and the 2600 version of *Mr. Run & Jump* are on offer. With Plaion as its partner, the 2600+ is Atari's next big hardware play.

Also on the hardware front are licensed products like the familiar Flashback consoles, and the *Missile Command* and *Food Fight* Replicade cabinets from New Wave Toys, among others. In January, Atari announced a partnership with Torrance, CA-based My Arcade to release three machines with built-in Atari collections.

When will the Polymega be integrated with the VCS? How will the new Atari 2600+ perform when it comes to market? Is there more unannounced hardware on the horizon? The answers to these questions remain to be seen. For the time being, Atari continues to

The 2600+ is Atari's next big hardware play.

support the VCS through quality first-party releases, the addition of homebrew to the VCS store, and a line-up of solid indie titles.

STRATEGIC ACQUISITIONS

Atari has a vast IP catalog of more than 200 titles. The problem is that its stable of well-known, beloved properties is relatively small. A*steroids, Breakout, Centipede, Missile Command, Pong, Tempest, Yars' Revenge* - and their spinoffs and sequels - have been done and re-done many times over the years.

While Atari under Rosen has shown a willingness to dig deeper into the existing catalog with games like *Akka Arrh, Black Widow: Recharged, Caverns of Mars: Recharged,* and *Quantum: Recharged,* it makes sense that the company has sought to expand its IP.

And Atari has been on an absolute tear when it comes to acquisitions.

The most recent spate of acquisitions began with the March 16, 2023 announcement that Atari purchased *Berzerk* and *Frenzy*, along with 10 other arcade games, from Stern Electronics. This announcement was followed by the immediate release of the Atari 2600 port of *Berzerk* on the Atari VCS. The Stern Electronics titles, particularly *Berzerk*, is well aligned with Atari's brand and we can almost assuredly look forward to a reimagined version of the game in the next few years.

Atari followed this move with the announcement of its acquisition of more than 100 PC and console titles from Accolade, Infogrames and Microprose, including the Accolade and GT Interactive brands. A full list of games included in the transaction(s) has not yet been made available, but it does include games from the *Bubsy, Hardball and Demolition Racer* series.

That didn't take long: Atari to release *Berzerk Enhanced* for the 2600.

Atari indicated a desire to "expand digital and physical distribution of the classic titles, create new games based on the IP and explore brand and merchandising collaborations." Interestingly, many of these properties were formally held under the Infogrames banner. As Bubsy might say, "What could *pawsibly* go wrong?"

In May 2023, Atari announced its acquisition of the M-Network brand and more than a dozen Atari 2600 games published under that label by Mattel Electronics in the 1980s. These games are essentially the 2600 versions of popular Intellivision properties, and they include games like *Astroblast, Frogs and Flies, and Dark Caverns.*

Of all the recent acquisitions by Atari, the purchase of Nightdive Studios is particularly interesting. Announced in March 2023 and completed in May, the Nightdive acquisition provides the publisher with an internal development house. This is something that Atari hasn't had in more than a decade. Nightdive most recently released the critically acclaimed *System Shock* remake and has previously released remasters of games like *Turok*, *Quake* and *Doom 64*. They bring tremendous expertise and credibility to the Atari brand. It will be exciting to see how these attributes are leveraged to bring Atari-owned IP to modern platforms.

Finally, in September 2023, Atari announced the acquisition of the beloved Atari fan forum AtariAge. The move was largely met with skepticism in the community. Is this simply Atari co-opting a community of fans and homebrew developers that it had no hand in cultivating? Will Atari be hands off of the forums and day-to-day operations? Time will tell.

One thing is certain, with these acquisitions it's clear that Atari is focused on building its stable of legacy properties and cultivating its internal software development capacity. Could Atari purchase the dormant Atari Games IP from Warner Bros. and finally reassemble the long sundered divisions of the original Atari Inc.? We can dare to dream.

Atari Age is now a subsidiary of Atari.

ATARI X

Atari has been flirting with Web 3.0 and blockchain for years. From NFTs of questionable quality and utility, to its large stake in The Sandbox, to the controversial issuance of its own crypto currency, blockchain has been - and will likely remain - a pillar of Atari's business for the foreseeable future.

In 2020, the company released the – now delisted – Atari Token in partnership with ICICB Group, purportedly for use in online gaming and gambling. Despite receiving millions of dollars, Atari Token never had much utility beyond speculative trading. Additionally, Atari Token was not fully under Atari's control and it was unclear how it would be used by ICICB and other partners.

Under Rosen, Atari announced the unilateral cancellation of its contracts with ICICB and disavowed Atari Token. At the same time, it announced the creation of Atari X; a new division of Atari that would oversee the company's Web 3.0 initiatives to ensure alignment with the Atari brand and a clear nexus to gaming.

Over the past year, Atari X has built a community of retrogaming and blockchain enthusiasts in conjunction with Atari's 50th anniversary. This included the release of the Atari 50 Collection NFT series from Brazilian pop artist Butcher Billy and the launch of Atari Club, a Web 3.0 experience that was initially limited to holders of the

Atari X is the company's newest foray into Web 3.0.

Atari Redemption Certificate (ARC) NFT. Holders of the Atari 50 NFTs have received a number of benefits including credits towards physical prints of their NFTs, discounts on Atari X merchandise, like shirts, hats and mugs, and early access to Atari Club and Atari's experience in the Sandbox. Atari X also hosts a very active Discord with regular contests for holders.

While it's clear that Atari is trying to offer some real world utility to gamers through Atari X, so far the experience has been lackluster. The gated Atari Club hosts high score contests (called Bob's Bounty) with HTML versions of Atari games like Asteroids and Centipede. These browser-based interpretations pale in comparison to the originals. The Web 3.0 experience itself is

reminiscent of Playstation Home from the PS3 era. It's not entirely unenjoyable, but it isn't particularly compelling after one or two visits. True blockchain gaming has yet to materialize under the Atari X banner. Additionally, Atari fans that are not interested in blockchain have bristled at their exclusion from Atari Club.

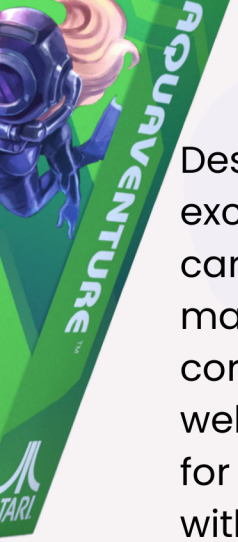
Rosen acknowledges the shortcomings and controversies of blockchain and Web 3.0. In a recent interview with Destructoid, he stated that Atari Club – which he bills as a "massive, immersive brand experience" – will be expanded to be inclusive of all fans. He went on to say "We know Web3 remains controversial, especially within the gaming industry, but we think the underlying technology has long-term potential..." Whether the core Atari fanbase will embrace the company's Web 3 projects is an open question.

ATARI XP

The Atari XP initiative was announced in November 2021. According to Atari, the Atari XP name was chosen to "honor the legacy of the Atari Program Exchange (APX), which encouraged both professional and amateur programmers to submit software to be considered for commercial distribution in the 1970s and '80s."

Under the Atari XP imprint, Atari were manufacturing new 2600 cartridges again for the first time since the early 1990s with the physical release of two-prototypes and one ROM hack; *Aquaventure, Saboteur,* and *Yars' Return.* Games were offered in two configurations: an unlimited Standard Edition (SE) for $50 and a Limited Edition (LE) for an eye-popping $150! The LE carts were to be limited to 1,983 copies.

Immediately there were issues. The mock-ups looked horrible. The copy on the website contained significant errors, including attributing *Aquaventure* to legendary programmer Howard Scott Warshaw, and claiming that *Yars' Return* – a 2005 hack created for the Flashback console – was a prototype slated for release in 1983.



Despite this, many fans were excited that new 2600 cartridges were being manufactured by Atari. Atari corrected the errors on the website. Pre-orders opened for both SE and LE cartridges, with the SE carts scheduled to ship in time for Christmas 2021. LE carts were to follow in Q1 2022.

Then silence.

December passed and 2021 ended with no updates on Atari XP production. The months dragged on. Q1 ended with no word. Then, in April 2022, Atari announced the final design of the cartridges and a partnership with Limited Run Games to distribute them. Confusion ensued. Would the LE carts be numbered? What was the total number of LE carts available? What about the customers who ordered directly from Atari in November 2021? When would these finally ship?

To add to the confusion, Atari also announced and then immediately withdrew an Atari XP re-release of *Adventure*.

Later, in June 2022, as part of the Atari 50th anniversary announcements, Atari re-announced *Adventure* along with *Missile Command* for pre-order. This second wave of XP games was later expanded to a 10 game set of re-releases for $100 each that – once complete - spell "Atari 50." Because these are generally common carts, the release was met with a lukewarm response from Atari fans, who were hoping for more rarities from the XP line. Meanwhile, customers with orders for the first three titles were still waiting.

Finally, nine months after being made available for pre-order, the first three Atari XP games shipped. **It was a shit show.** Every single SE cartridge was assembled and shipped with the PCB installed backwards. This rendered the carts functionally unusable. Additionally, labels on the SE carts were of generally poor quality, and the manual for *Aquaventure* in both SE and LE versions contained significant print errors. To its credit, Atari and its manufacturing partner worked to swiftly correct the

issues. New SE carts and manuals were sent out to customers, along with a note of apology and pins and patches that were previously only available with the LE carts.

On the plus side, the LE packages look fantastic. The design of the cartridges is stunning and the light up marquees, while admittedly gimmicky, look cool. As of this writing, the Atari 50 carts are reaching customers and the quality control is markedly improved from the initial XP run.

Its been a rocky start, but Atari XP could be something really great. Already, Atari have announced the 2600 version of *Mr. Run & Jump* and *Outlaw* for release. For the line to be successful, Atari and its manufacturing partner will need to step up quality control and deliver on their original promise to release rarities and prototypes.

CONCLUSION

While there is still a lot of work to be done to regain the trust of Atari fans and build awareness in the broader community of gamers, modern-day Atari is largely delivering the type and kind of gaming experiences that made the brand special in the first place. Atari has reconnected with its founding ethos – easy to play, hard to master – this is apparent in reimagined titles and new IP alike.

By partnering with developers like Digital Eclipse, and canceling crypto and casino contracts, the company has demonstrated real care and understanding of its legacy. Recent acquisitions represent an investment in Atari's future. Despite initial missteps, Atari XP is a unique opportunity to bring premium reissues and prototypes to Atari's classic platforms. The Atari VCS continues to power ahead, at least on the software front, with new hardware on the horizon.

Whether this newest incarnation of the company can succeed in the long run is anyone's guess. But for gamers who are looking for fun, accessible arcade-like experiences, there is a lot to enjoy and look forward to.

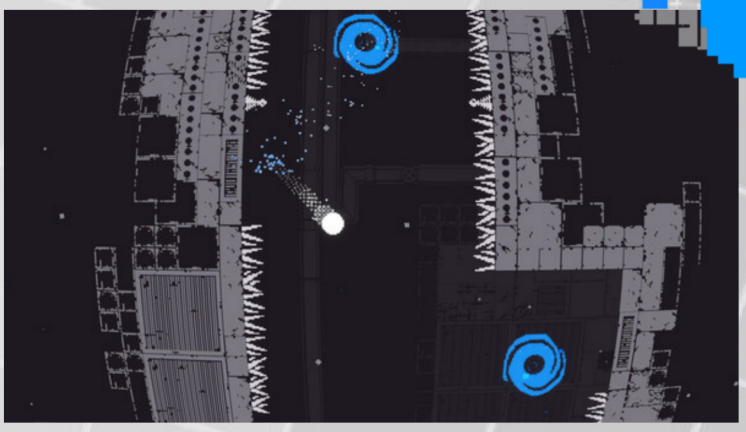
The fun is back, oh yes sir'ee!

JOIN
THE
CLUB
CLUB VCS

PREVIEWS

QOMP 2

Graphite Lab/Atari
Release: TBD



Qomp 2 follows the adventure of a Pong ball escaping from single screen confinement into a world of treacherous puzzles. It's essentially an expanded take on the original *Qomp* released in 2020. Use a single button tap to shift direction and charge up a dash to break through obstacles in what is sure to be another great puzzler from *Kombinera* developers Graphite Lab.

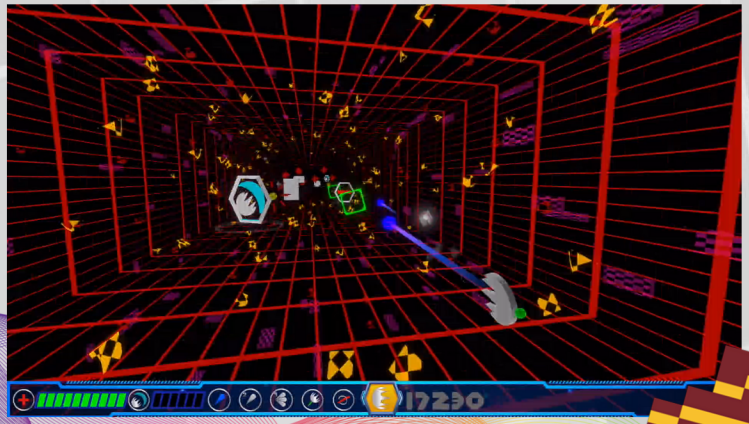
HAUNTED HOUSE

Orbit Studio/Atari
Release: October 12, 2023

Haunted House is yet another reimagining of Atari's classic survival horror IP. For this outing, Atari has partnered with developer Orbit Studio to create a stealth based roguelite. Lyn Graves and her pals venture through Uncle Zachary's mansion to piece together the broken magic urn. The 3D isometric world of *Haunted House* looks stunning. With procedurally generated rooms and random enemy placements, the ghouls and ghosts of *Haunted House* should be the perfect way to spend Halloween!

SUPER STAR SHOOTER 16

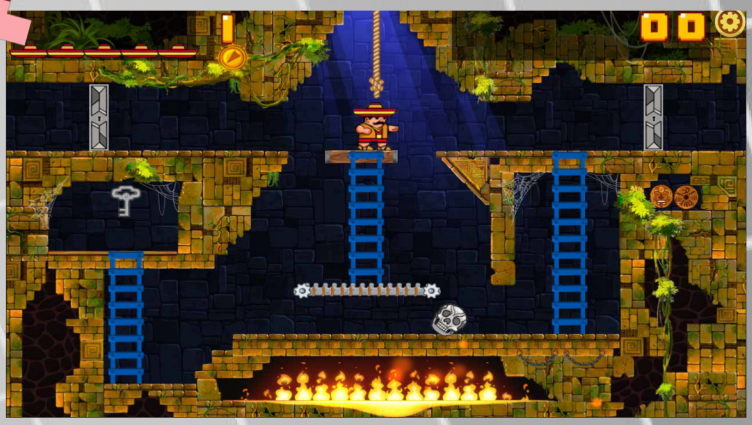
J.D. Video Game Productions
Release: October 6, 2023



J.D. Video Games Productions brings this trippy on-rails shooter to the VCS on October 6, 2023. *Super Star Shooter 16* evokes the spirit of classic arcade games like *Blaster* by Vid Kidz. Colorful abstract graphics meet frenetic shooting in this high-score chaser. With voice synthesis and Classic Controller rotary support, this game is sure to be a blast!

MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE

Normal Distribution, LLC
Release: TBD



40 years after releasing on the Atari 8-bit computers, *Montezuma's Revenge* hits the Atari VCS! The Meso-American themed adventure has been revamped with updated graphics, a bevy of screen filter options and save states. Prefer something a little more retro? A retro game mode is also included for that old school experience.

WYVIA

Blast Programming/GIGATANK 3000
Release: TBD

Wyvia is the first proper RPG announced for the Atari VCS. From developer Blast Programming and publisher GIGATANK 3000, this JRPG inspired open world adventure promises 10 customizable classes, dungeon crawling, and a vast world to explore. Harness the power of the Wyvern and stop the monster invasion!

BERZERK: RECHARGED

Sneaky Box/Atari

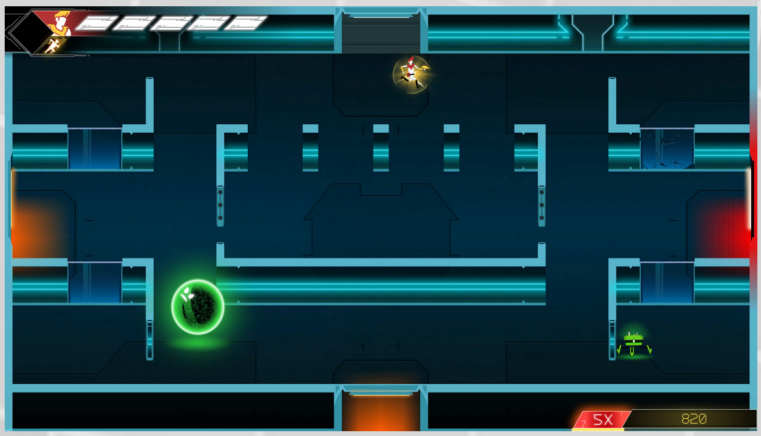
Release: TBD

When Atari announced its acquisition of a dozen Stern Electronics retro game IPs in March 2023, including *Berzerk*, everyone wondered how long it would take for the publisher to release *Berzerk: Recharged.* On October 5, 2023, Atari gave us our answer: **SOON!**

That's right, Evil Otto and his horde of robots are back in this Recharged series adaptation of the Stern Electronics classic.

Berzerk: Recharged is billed as a twin-stick shooter and this seems like a natural fit for the game. It will be interesting to see how Classic Controller support will be implemented. Will we see rotary control like *Yars: Recharged?* Or true dual-stick action like *Black Widow: Recharged?*

As with other Recharged series titles, the game will feature an Arcade Mode with "an endless maze of random rooms" and five difficulty levels; a Challenge Mode with "20 hand-crafted" rooms; as well as other series hallmarks like power-ups, local co-op and leaderboards. Megan McDuffee is back to deliver an all original soundtrack. Judging by the music in the trailer, it's a banger!



The game features glowing neon mazes and stylized, cartoon-like character graphics. The design has received a mixed response from fans. Some have likened the player character to a '50s sci-fi version of Conan O'brien. Others pine for a more traditional take on the robots and Evil Otto.

As long as we get cool voice synthesis and solid gameplay, I'm ready to fight like a robot!

THE VOICE OF A VILLAIN

AN INTERVIEW WITH BPM VOICE TALENT

BY RICK R

Patrick Hickey Jr is a dynamo. He's the author of the excellent ***Minds Behind the Games*** retro gaming book series, owner and editor-in-chief of the independent comic book company **Legacy Comix**, as well as creator of the awesome ***Condrey* series**, and a family man.

I was very surprised to learn he also did voice acting for the super-fun Atari VCS timed exclusive *BPM Boy* by RetroNinja, performing as the main villain **DJ Git Bizy!**

We don't often get to learn about the voice acting aspect of video game design, and I had questions. Patrick generously agreed to a quick e-mail Q&A, which I am sharing here. I hope you enjoy this as much as I did.

Let's jump right in!

You voiced DJ Git Bizy in BPM Boy. Did you do any other characters in the game?

Just the narration for the trailers when needed away from that.

How did you get the gig? Do you know Tony Barnes?

I've known Tony (Barnes) for a few years. Amazing guy. He wrote the forward to my Minds Behind Sega Genesis book and we chat all the time. Tons of respect for his near 40-year career in gaming. Knowing him has been a pleasure.

How much time did it take? All done in one sitting?

Not in one sitting. Lots of back and worth. I'd say about six sittings- about an hour a shot. The voice is a blast to do, but it requires energy and no distractions haha. With two kids sometimes, that's not easy.

Was a script provided? Any ad-libbing?

Yes, Tony is a pro- so always a script, but I've learned from the best voice actors that I've interviewed and worked with over the years, like Dana Snyder (Aqua Teen Hunger Force) and you've got to ad-lib and make every character your own. So there's a lot of that in there too.

Where did you record your parts? In your home, in a studio, or ???

A little bit of both. I have a great microphone and my mancave works awesome as a makeshift studio. I also have access to a recording lab that I use from time to time.

What was your favorite thing about working on BPM Boy?

The game is a tribute to Tony's mom and Marble Madness. Add in Tony's underrated ability as a composer and it's a sleeper gem that I believe deserves a ton of play. Working with Tony and watching it progress from concept to finished game was the best part. The fact that one of my comic book artists (I own and serve as the Editor-In-Chief of Legacy Comix), Valentin Quinones, contributed the cover art and some other art really made me feel like I played a part in this.

What was it like to hear and see your character come to life in the game? What do your kids think?

It was great and it was my first time playing a villain, so total bucket list :). My kids love the character. He's silly so they always laugh when they hear his voice.

Patrick Hickey Jr. is the owner and editor-in-chief of Legacy Comix. Learn more at legacycomix.com

BPM Boy launched as a timed Atari VCS exclusive from industry veteran Tony Barnes (RetroNinja). Learn more at retroninja.com

Have you played the finished game on the VCS or any other platform?

I don't own a VCS unfortunately but have seen the game in various forms. I'd love to own it on the console one day.

What do you think DJ Git Bizy's favorite track is?

Something with a lot of scratching and bass. I'd say, DJ Kool's *Let Me Clear My Throat* might be up there.

Did you have any involvement with the game designers? For example, did they show you animations to help get you in the right mindset?

Oh yeah, Tony did an amazing job of keeping me in the loop. It was one of my best experiences as a voice actor to date. Having interviewed him for so many of my Minds Behind the Games books definitely helped me get comfortable with how he worked. I think we killed it.

Which other games have you done voice acting for? I know of WrestleQuest and World Championship Boxing Manager II. Any others upcoming?

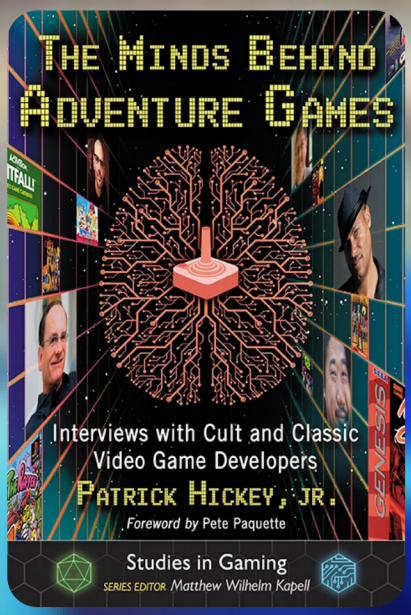
I'm the main character in Feardemic's *The Padre* series. That's on Steam and all major consoles. Tons of small indies like *The Kaiju Offensive* and even more trailers, *Relentless Rex* and *Roniu's Tale* immediately come to mind.

Final questions - tell us how far back you go with retro gaming. First system? Favorite game?

The first system I ever owned was the NES- I was born in '83. My favorite game is impossible to answer, but I'd say probably *Fallout 3, Final Fantasy VII, NHLPA 93, Pokemon Red, and Virtual Pro Wrestling 2* are my Mount Rushmore. My favorite Atari game ever is probably *Food Fight* :)

I lied -- one more: What is your favorite drink at Dunkin Donuts?

Large Iced, Black, Three Pumps of Caramel and Mocha.



Patrick Hickey Jr.'s *The Minds Behind the Games* series interviews developers from the earliest days of gaming. Learn more at patrickhickeyjr.com

RECHARGED SQUAD CHALLENGE

HALL OF HEROES

001 - MISSILE COMMAND: RECHARGED	D. JOE	23,125
002 - CENTIPEDE: RECHARGED	D. JOE	117,120
003 - BLACK WIDOW: RECHARGED	D. JOE	14,870
004 - ASTEROIDS: RECHARGED	D. JOE	48,630
005 - BREAKOUT: RECHARGED	YORKIES TV	17,1740
006 - TEMPEST 4000	TRIPLED	2,024,494
007 - YARS: RECAHARGED	D.JOE	128,700
008 - DONUT DODO	STIRRELL	251,617
009 - GRAVITAR: RECHARGED	TRIPLED	36,889
010 - JETBOARD JOUST	SABERTOOTH	382,113
011 - VCTR-SCTR	D.JOE	96,057
012 - NEO BREAKOUT	KILLERSQUIREL	195,972
013 - MISSILE COMMAND: RECHARGED	MARCO1019	132,840
014 - AKKA ARRH	MOCKDUCK	104,283,514
015 - CAVERNS OF MARS	D.JOE	239,985
016 - AMOEBA JUMP	SMELL DAWG	20,013
017 - YARS' REVENGE: ENHANCED	RICK R	160,303
018 - ALIEN ABDUCTION	SMELL DAWG	41,891

atari.IO

WIN IT!

CLUB VCS RECHARGED SQUAD CHALLENGE GIVEAWAY: SERIES IV

From July 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023 we will play six VCS games. After the last game, we will hold a drawing for one (1) limited edition Tempest Dad Hat.

GIVEAWAY RULES:

1) All challenge participants will receive one (1) entry for each challenge in which they submit a valid score!

2) The top scorer of each challenge will receive two (2) additional entries - for a total of three (3) entries in a single challenge!

3) On Twitch or Youtube? Stream or record and post your ClubVCS high score attempt for one (1) additional entry in each round. You must post a link to the video in that month's Recharged Squad Challenge.

BUT ARE THERE BUTTONS?

Yes! We've made another set of ClubVCS buttons to celebrate the games in this series. There will be two ways to get a button set.

1) Win a challenge.

2) Post a valid score to all challenges in the 6 game series.

Only one button set will be mailed per member during the series.

This contest is open to everybody, including Atari I/O Moderators, with a U.S. or Canada mailing address. It's really easy, all you have to do is be a Club VCS member in good standing and participate in our Recharged Squad Challenges.

atari.IO
HIGH SCORE SQUAD

SCORE CHASERS

DRILLER JOE

Look at any **VCS** online leaderboard and you'll see one name over and over again at or near the top: **Driller Joe**. Not only is Driller Joe the winningest participant in the **CLUB VCS RECHARGED SQUAD CHALLENGE,** he has also claimed victory in several tournaments on **Antstream Arcade**.

Driller Joe is the *Lord Humungus* of the VCS Community

We chatted with Joe about his **"humungus"** appetite for the high score chase.

SCORE CHASERS

What was the very first game (title/platform), you remember achieving a high score on?

I would have to say Pooyan arcade. We had that one in summer camp, and I couldn't stop playing it!

It's fair to say that you are a tenacious competitor when it comes to high scores. What do you love about the high score chase?

I have always been competitive with everything I do. I think its the Aries stubbornness in me. The VCS has the most interesting players in my opinion.

In your view, how does the Atari VCS rank as compared to other platforms when it comes to high score chasing?

Like I said, the VCS has the best leaderboards in my opinion. So, definitely number 1.

What's currently your favorite game on the VCS and why?

Currently, it's *Flappy Wings of Death* (aka *Avian Knights*). Trying to make it to that tournament in Utah and meet some of the other awesome players on the VCS Discord.

Do you have a special denim jacket for all of those Squad Challenge pins that you've won?

LOL! I put them on my shelf and brag to my kids and wife about them.

Joe's Favorite VCS game?: *Flappy Wings of Death*

DON'T SLEEP ON CLOUD GAMING ON THE VCS

by Jerry Snook, Mockduck Plays Games

Cloud gaming has become an actual thing that just works in recent years, following about a decade of formative baby steps that laid the groundwork for a quick jump into the future today. The VCS makes it arguably easier than any other device to press a button and access the widest selection of games and other streaming services, and if you've not checked out cloud gaming on your VCS, don't wait! Future us will look back on these times as a “golden era” before things got more expensive and less amazing, so check these services out before it's too late!

Antstream Arcade

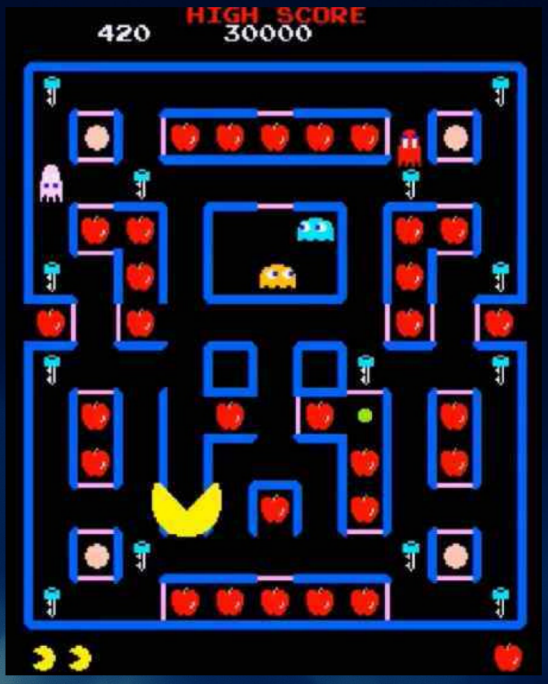
Free/$3.99/mo./$39.99 yr.

Also on: Linux, Mac, PC, Nvidia Shield, Android, Amazon Fire, Xbox, Epic Games Store

Antstream Arcade has the biggest retro games library in cloud gaming, bar none, and if you have a VCS and like retro gaming you NEED to check Antstream out. Antstream is run out of the United Kingdom and has a particularly European focus to its catalog, especially when it comes to classic computing. This is where VCS owners can play the original arcade *Space Invaders* and more.

Where you sign up matters! In recent years Antstream debuted on the Epic Games Store and the Microsoft Store on Xbox, but those versions are walled gardens where accounts created there do not offer cross-platform play on other devices. Signing up via the VCS, PC, or mobile gets you cross- platform, and it works great. There's even an account-based Favorites system to create your favorite playlist.

Bubble Bobble, Defender, Robotron, Burgertime, Pac-Man, Elevator Action, Bump n' Jump, Double Dragon, Ikari Warriors, Mortal Kombat, Smash TV, Metal Slug, Joust, Bad Dudes vs. Dragon Ninja, Marble Madness, Gauntlet, Lock N Chase, Boulder Dash, Rampart, Pit-Fighter, Samurai Shodown, need I say more? How about pinball games, text adventure games, casino games, old school computer games, racing and sports games and beyond. From the Amiga version of the *Secret of Monkey Island* to the Commodore 64 version of *The Very Big Cave Adventure*, Antstream has the deepest and most interesting catalog in retro gaming today. Antstream Arcade absolutely rules!



Super Pac-Man on Anstream Arcade

XBOX CLOUD GAMING

$17/mo. cross-platform/$10/mo. PC-only/$11/mo. Xbox Only
Also on: PC, Android, Xbox, Samsung TV

We live in a world where new game releases are hitting $70, but we also live in a world where no one needs to buy a video game ever again. It's a great place to be, it probably won't last, and now's the time to take advantage of it. Xbox Cloud Gaming, better known as Xbox Game Pass, is probably the best of all of them.

Here is where you'll play *Forza, Mass Effect, Halo, Persona, Flight Simulator, Assassin's Creed, Battlefield, Doom, Dragon Age, Fallout, Mortal Kombat, Elder Scrolls, Yakuza, and Minecraft.*

Having Xbox Game Pass Ultimate on the VCS means you maybe don't need a different gaming console this generation. Sadly, the streaming video quality on Game Pass is slightly worse than any of the other services I've tried, with noticeable and semi-regular artifacting.

Gears of War 5 via XBOX Cloud Gaming on the Atari VCS

Your Game Pass Ultimate subscription on the VCS carries over to the PC and web browser based versions of Xbox Cloud Gaming. Head to xbox.com/play if you don't want to use the app. There is also an app for Android and iOS, and your subscription carries over to your Xbox if you have one.

An exmple of artifacting while streaming via Xbox Cloud Gaming

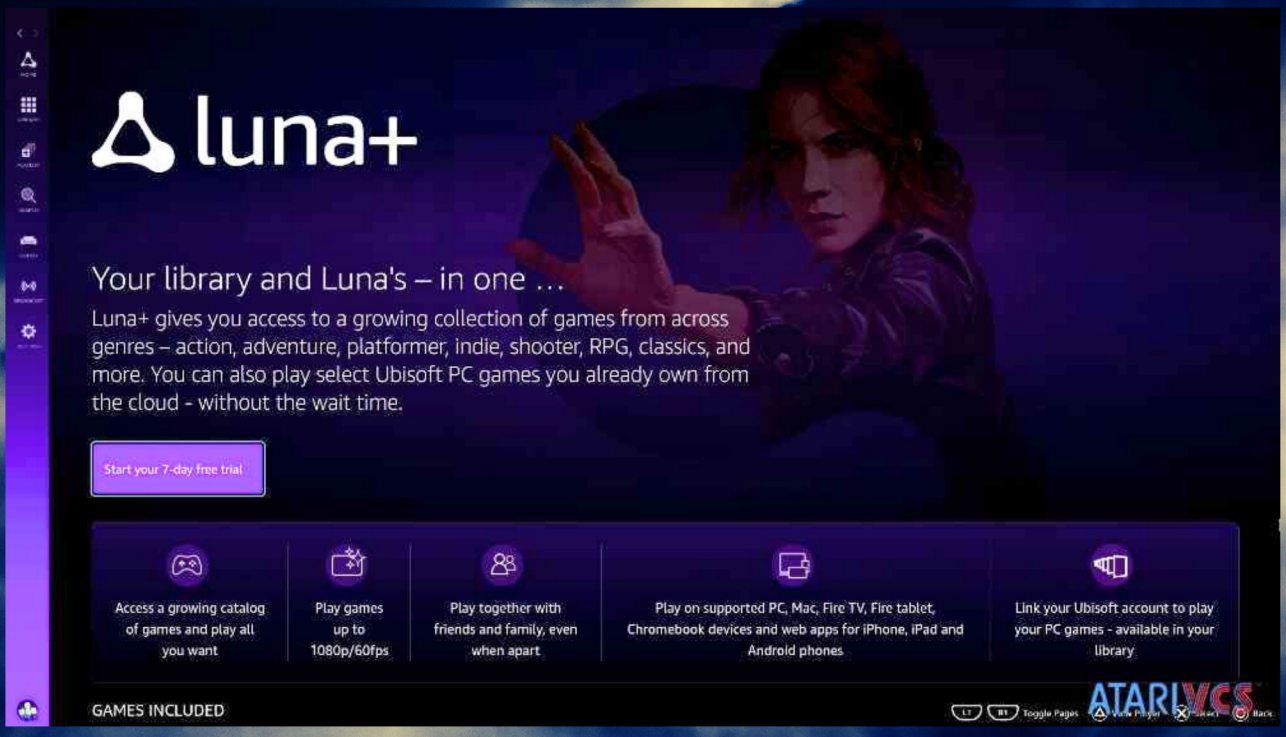
AMAZON LUNA

$9.99/mo.

Also on: PC, Mac, Chrome, Fire TV, iOS, Android, Samsung TV

Amazon Luna is the retail singularity's entry into the Cloud Gaming Service market, and it feels similar to the recently-ended Google Stadia (RIP). Luna is available across most devices, with the notable exceptions of both Playstation and Xbox, making the VCS the best way to get Luna onto your living room TV.

Luna is available in the United States, Canada, UK, and Germany. The overall experience is excellent, but the number of games is relatively small. Of particular interest is the *Capcom Classics* in addition to the *Castlevania* collection, a handful of Atari arcade titles, and Data East classics. If nothing else, Luna+ is a great way to play the classic 80's laserdisc games *Dragons Lair I, II and Space Ace.* Luna also offers modern gaming experiences like *Fortnite*, although their catalog lacks many bigger new releases.



Dragon's Lair II streaming via Amazon Luna on the Atari VCS

If you have an Amazon Prime membership you'll get a rotating selection of free games to play each month. The rest is gated behind a Luna+ membership. There's also a Jackbox Party subscription for $5/month, and an inexplicably expensive Ubisoft subscription for $18 per month.

Luna is the only current way to livestream games directly from your VCS in AtariOS! Livestreaming to Twitch is embedded into Luna, and Luna supports most basic USB cameras and microphones. You even have access to chat while streaming!

GeForce Now

$10/mo. /$20/mo. for higher quality video
Also on: PC, Mac, Chrome, Shield TV, some Samsung/LG TV's, iOS, Android

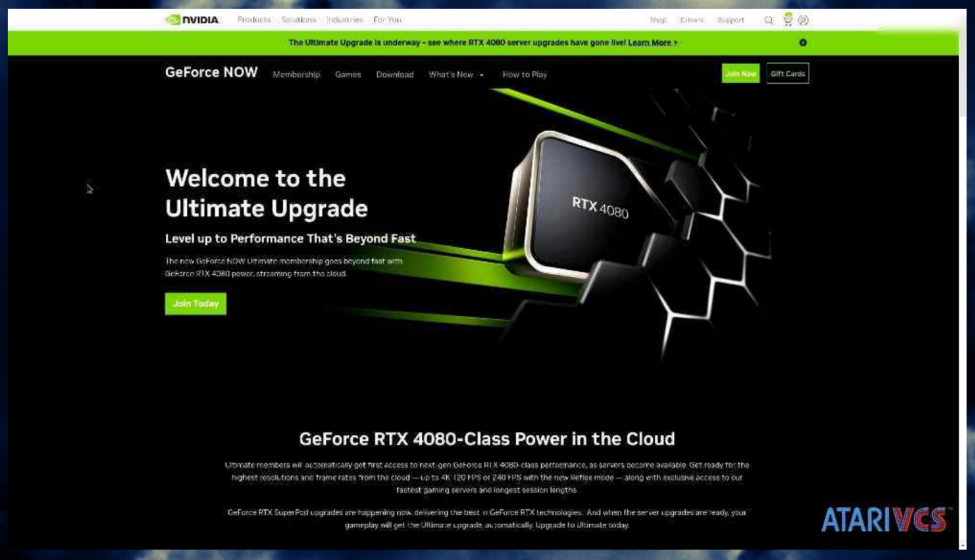
GeForce Now is going for something different than the other cloud gaming services. While the others focus on a growing library of games, GeForce Now aims to bring games you already own to the cloud. This means your interest in GeForce Now probably depends a lot on how big your Steam and Epic Games libraries are.

The service supports more than 1500 titles, which is just a fraction of the Steam and Epic libraries. Of the more than 300 games in my libraries only 62 were available to play in GeForce Now. You need a mouse and keyboard to navigate, but once in-game a standard wired VCS or other controller works fine.

GeForce Now offers the most generous free service. If you're unpaid you will face long queue times to play games, generally slower and less quality service, and stereo rather than multi-channel audio. You also have an hour of gaming per session, although it is quick and easy to begin another session. The quality is great, though, even free is in 1080p 60 depending on your bandwidth and connection.

Cuphead streaming via GeForce Now on the Atari VCS

Unlike other streaming services you are connecting to actual gaming computers when you use GeForce Now, and it feels like it. These are nice computers utilizing Ray Tracing and up to 120 Frames per Second in 4K, but it feels low-tech to essentially remote into a computer somewhere instead of the near instant loading of other cloud gaming services. I also noticed Steam games which have a lot of Workshop Mod support suffer in GeForce Now due to the need to download all of those mods onto a computer somewhere.

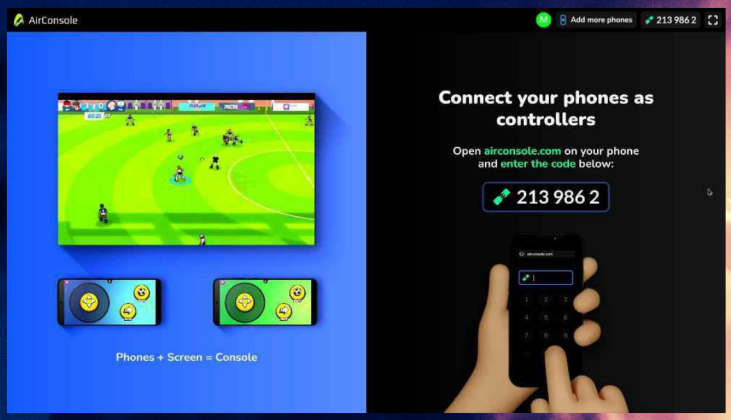


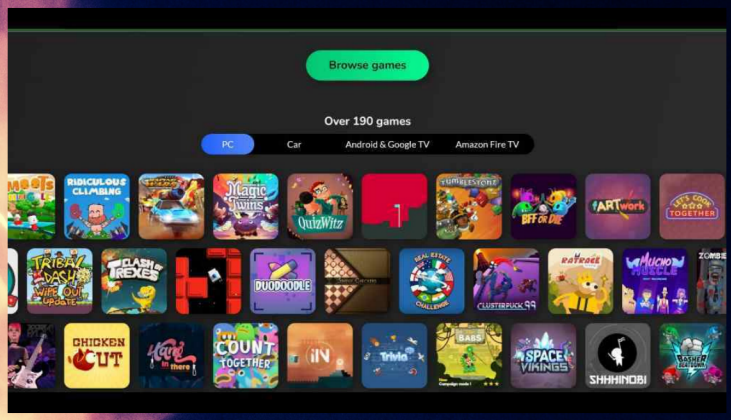
While GeForce Now might not be for everyone, it's a great option if you want to play some (but not all) of your Steam games in AtariOS.

AirConsole

$7.99/mo./$23.99/yr.
Also on: PC, Android, Google TV, Amazon Fire TV, some BMW and Mini in-dash vehicles

AirConsole is being included because it's a great option for “Family Game Night”. This is how a group of people with phones play trivia and simple mobile-style games together through your Atari VCS. The best part about AirConsole is just how easy it is to get everyone connected, provided they are all connected to the same wi-fi network. Simply navigate to Airconsole.com, enter in your code, and join in. Everyone plays the games using their phones as controllers, and it works surprisingly well. Only one person needs to subscribe to the paid “Hero” tier in order to unlock all of the games for everyone playing. AirConsole otherwise offers a rotating slate of a handful of games for free.





While the games themselves might be a bit second-tier and generic, they are also family-friendly and fun. A decent option for the younger gamer in your house as well, and it might be just the right thing for extended family gatherings

Thanks for reading. *Mockduck Plays Games* is a YouTube channel dedicated to the new Atari VCS with a bit of general retro gaming. Find me on YouTube.com/MockduckPlaysGames!

CREATOR SPACE

CREATOR SPACE features interviews and content from **our favorite creators** in the **Atari VCS** community. For our first issue we had a chat with **Podan,** of the YouTube Channel ***I LOVE,*** about the channel, his love of all things Atari and **those amazing thumbnails**!

I LOVE is an interesting name for a YouTube channel. Can you tell us the background behind your choice in the name?

Lets go back a bit further and start with why I created the channel, too, as I feel they are actually intertwined a bit. I really like tons of stuff and in particular, I tend to love movies that critics and reviewers do not enjoy very much. I don't think these movies are bad but people tend to expect something else when they are watching certain movies, or just want to rag on a children's movie for not being in depth enough for them. LOL. This made me really want to make a YouTube channel to express my love for these things and at the very least, be a beacon for others like myself saying loud and proud, "It's ok for you to enjoy this!"; even if everyone else says it sucks. So I thought about it for a while. I really wanted a name for the channel that I could organically use in the titles and would also express what my channel was all about. That being, a place to express my love of many things. I LOVE became the best choice.

For a peek behind the process, here are two names that I did not use from opposite ends of the spectrum; *RADreviews, NerdVirgil.*

The thumbnails for ***I LOVE*** are some of the best we've seen. They are high quality and frequently hilarious! What's your approach/ inspiration in designing your thumbnails? What's your favorite thumbnail on the channel?

This is actually going to be best answered by both **my brother Lenny** and me, as he is the artist for the thumbnails and the graphics I use in the videos and channel. I am on the design side of these pieces, he is the graphical wizard as you have all seen. I'll give him a basic idea or he has one. Something usually to do with the video's content. Then I let him go crazy. Along the way we both have fun ideas we throw at each other and he tries many out. After a short time he lands on something truly fun and incredible always. My favorite one still has to be from video twenty four, *Space Jam A New Legacy*. It turned out so damn funny and beautifully perfect.

Take it **Lenny** - Thank you for the compliment. I appreciate it. Both my brother and I are passionate about film and we grew up watching classic cartoons; such as Hanna Barbara, Disney, and Warner Bros, so we approach every thumbnail as a director would create a scene. Each image is designed to advertise the content of the video in a light-hearted and humorous way the same way a painting can transport you to another place. We spend many hours brain storming together before I begin working on one concept and

many times it will change dramatically from a random conversation regarding the artwork during a review. Like the cartoons we loved as children, our design and collaboration process is fun and full of happy mistakes. I'd say my favorite composition is the twenty third video for *Battlebots.*

It was an exciting challenge to create and give the appearance of realism; especially the bridal that my brother is grasping tightly, in reality he's actually holding two large permanent markers. I laugh every single time I look at it.

Outside of Atari and the Atari VCS, what kind of content can viewers expect on ***I LOVE***?

The channel is for all things ***I LOVE***, so many different things. But everybody can expect content covering more new video games for old consoles, toys old and new, hobbies, cool drinks and maybe food, movies, and TV shows. Basically all things nerdy, retro and fun. I Love a lot of stuff and I'm willing to bet, so do all of you.

What was your first experience with **Atari**? Did you grow up with Atari consoles?

My first experience with Atari is a collaboration of three distinct memories. First my Dad would tell us (my brother and I) stories of how his friends and him would play Atari 2600 *Star Raiders* in the basement on a projector before we were born. He told us the game was so much fun and incredible while played with the projector in the pitch black. It made them all feel like they were actually flying through space and the closest thing to being in a space fantasy like Star Trek or Star Wars. Funny enough he would never play the games with us and we never really knew why.

Second my mother loved to play *Centipede* and *Millipede* with us, they were her favorite video games. We would play with her on both the Atari 2600 and Colecovision (it's a secret, but she did enjoy it on Coleco more).

Third, because the NES was out during this time, I could use the 2600 whenever I wanted since the NES would be in the living room or in my brother's room as he was the oldest. So I could play it all the time and it felt like it was my video game console hooked up in my room.

Growing up with Atari consoles is also a funny answer for me, we only ever had the Atari 2600 for Atari consoles in our house. Never having money for Lynx or the Jaguar when they came out and to be honest when we were kids I don't think we even knew the 5200 and 7800 existed. We had the NES and a Genesis during this time too. As a testament to how much fun Atari

games are, the 2600 is all we needed to grow a love for the games they created. I still think back to how often through grade school (the 90s) and high school (the 2000s) with the SNES or PS2 eras going on, I would bust out the 2600 and old box of games with our friends and have tons of fun for hours. Challenging each other to getting the highest score in *Pac Man, Asteroids* or just destroying each other's Tanks in some good old fashion *Combat*.

What do you love about the **Atari VCS**?

Pretty much everything. I originally was just excited to see Atari back in the game so I backed the original campaign with low expectations. Just hoping to get a new console and a few new originals remade for it to enjoy with that new joystick. Since coming out Atari has kept us stocked with Indie titles and Atari originals fully killing my expectations of the console with now over 100 games on the Atari VCS store!

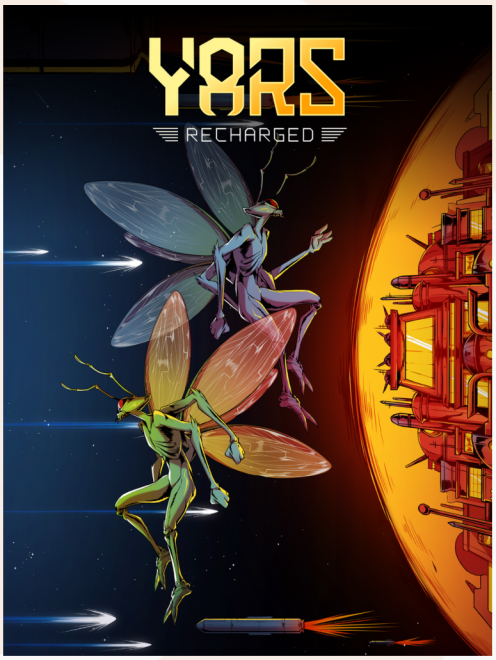
In addition the VCS is able to be used as a mini PC or a Game console being a hybrid device, allowing it to be enjoyed/used by more than just gamers like me. This actually follows in suit with some of the original Atari business models for their products to be accessible to the masses, not the classes. I use my Atari VCS as a video game console primarily and love playing my Recharged games on it everyday.

What's currently your **favorite Atari VCS game**, and why?

Yars: Recharged. Simple, I play it every time I turn on my Atari VCS. I love it's use of the Joystick and all of it's functionality including the spinner to spin your ship. I really enjoy the single screen gameplay here... you come to a sector of space with a large enemy space station. You then have to destroy it to move on to your next encounter. Fantastic, and it follows the original narrative of the game. The games I enjoy and play the most on my Atari VCS tend to be the games that utilize the Joystick's capabilities as much as possible.

What is your favorite Atari game of all time (any platform)?

Let's go old favorite and a new for this. Old, on 2600 and Arcade it has to be ***Asteroids.***



Podan's favorite Recharged game? *Yars Recharged.*

I always have to give it a play if I happen to stumble on a machine. The 2600 version is perfect for the console and a true achievement for the time, as it plays almost exactly the same as the arcade machine did. Always tons of fun to play! For new, I mean of course something I did not play my entire life like Asteroids... Major Havoc! I ran into more recently but it is one of the best games I've ever played. It's changing gameplay makes it tons of fun to play again and again. Having beautiful vector graphics and a super entertaining demo screen story are a few great reasons to love this one and give it a try if you can or do run into the machine in person.

If you could pick one game for Atari to "recharge" or "reimagine", what would it be?

Easy, ***Major Havoc!*** I would love to see them recreate the changing gameplay of this classic. Starting as a Shooter like *Space Invaders* to destroy the space stations guard ships, then changing to a *Lunar Lander* style to land on the Space Station for an invasion of the enemy base, then of course turning into a side scroller to plant the bomb and escape to travel to their next battle station! There was even a small bonus game, you could play breakout while waiting in your ship on approach to the next Space Station. Just Fantastic all around and it would be awesome to see this one come back.

As someone who follows developments for all things Atari, what predictions (or hopes) do you have for the future of the **Atari VCS?**

I'll toss out a few crazy ones that would excite anybody who loves Atari I think, and Atari if you read this, come on... please.

Hopefully we get some sort of USB connected cartridge drive to play old and new games through your VCS. This could work for any of the Carts; 2600, 5200, 7800, Lynx or even Jaguar. Any would rock our socks off and kick serious butt. Or even an official Atari retro mini console. If they did this I think most of us would really like to see the Lynx or Jaguar at this point, and I believe they would sell really well nowadays. As there are more fans of both these awesome consoles today, the 90s are the new retro now. A final one, not as crazy and a bit easier, Atari could get Lynx and Jaguar game roms on the VCS store. I would imagine the VCS could handle the emulation and maybe Digital Eclipse can help them out with the technical side. Either way, I think we can expect the Atari VCS to continue to surprise us and continue to live on. Have you played Atari today?

We want to snap into a Slim Jim whenever we watch ***I LOVE.*** Is "Oooh yeah!" the Macho Man Randy Savage reference that we think it is?

This is funny and I never really thought about it. I think the first time I say it on ***I LOVE*** was in the Power Rangers episode. It happened on impulse alone because my inner child was exploding over seeing my favorite Megazord that I never had as a kid. Then I kept doing it because it felt so good and my brother loved it. That being said, I think on a subliminal level it definitely is, as I am a child of that era and have said "Oooh Yeah!" for a long time for many occasions. Also, I've seen those Slim Jim commercials so many times, I would have to guess TV really does brain wash us. 😉

The late great Macho Man Randy Savage. A subliminal inspiration?

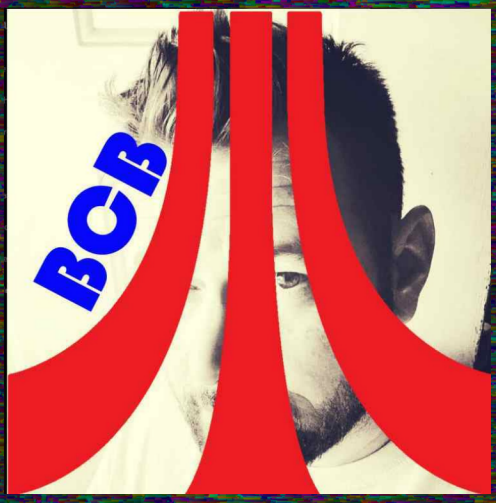
A huge thank you to **PODAN** and his brother **LENNY** for taking the time to answer our questions. If you haven't already, check out ***I LOVE!***

youtube.com/@ILoveStuffandSoDoYou

CLUB GUIDE

What we're watching!

BALLISTIK COFFEE BOY



One of the most prolific creators of Atari-related content, Ballistik Coffee Boy ("BCB") has you covered for Atari news, reviews, gameplay and interviews. When news breaks in the world of Atari, you can count on BCB and the *Atari Newsline* for the latest. Miss that Atari VCS game drop? Check out BCB's *No Filter HD* for exclusive first looks at new games. Want to learn more about your favorite Atari dev or retro content creator? Tune into *That Atari Show* for BCB's great interviews.

What are you waiting for? Grab a cup of java and check out BCB!

youtube.com/@ballistik_coffee_boy

RETRO RICH

BACON ICE CREAM PRODUCTIONS

"Retro" Rich Heywood of Bacon Ice Cream Productions is the host of *Good Times With "Retro" Rich* which focuses on retro gaming coverage and news. He frequently features Atari VCS content with his *Fun for Five* videos, where he plays each game with the hope to find the fun! Want breaking news? Rich has you covered with *The Good Times Newsline Flashcast!*

For a positive take on retro gaming and geek culture, "Retro" Rich is certified good times!

youtube.com/@BaconIceCream

Hello world. Welcome to Atari I/O. We couldn't be more excited about Club VCS and the wild energy Sabertooth has crafted to make Club VCS an unreal experience, and the crown jewel of the Atari VCS world. We wanted to create an incredible place for you in our Atari I/O community. Atari VCS players are welcome here. Atari Age members are welcome here. Young people discovering the World of Atari for the first time are welcome here. Elder gamers are welcome here. Atari I/O is a Disney World of classic gaming - a special place in cyberspace, welcoming people of all ages and skill levels to gather, play and trade with friends, discussing our favorite hobbies and continuing the neverending adventure of what comes NeXT.

Justin, Atari I/O

atari.io

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CLUB VCS